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ABSTRACT

Continuing education/community service programs are increasing in importance as vehicles through which the community college can serve the community. While the idea of the community college being a center for community activities and providing a wide range of services to the community is appealing, there is considerable discussion about the appropriate role of community colleges as service agencies. An illustration is provided by the more than 100 community colleges and technical institutes in the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) area that have developed programs, services, and activities for older citizens, including: training programs in paraprofessional counseling at Dundalk Community College (Maryland) and Tri-County Technical Institute (South Carolina); a Retired Senior Volunteer Program at Snead State Junior College (Alabama); a pre-retirement education program at Daytona Beach Community College (Florida); a nutrition education program at Catonsville Community College (Maryland); and the Senior Aides program at Copiah-Lincoln Junior College (Mississippi) which places senior citizens in public service jobs. Continuing education programs requiring little or no tuition are provided by 38 colleges in the SREB region. While few would question the worth of such programs, there needs to be consensus on what the community service role of the community college is and what it is not. (LH)

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
AND
ITS COMMUNITY SERVICE ROLE

ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
NUMBER 8

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The Community College and Its Community Service Role

Dynamic growth has been a hallmark characteristic of community junior colleges in the post-World War II period in the nation as a whole and in the South (Figure 1). In 1964 degree-credit and non-degree credit enrollment in public community colleges in the states of the SREB region was about 190,000. In 1974, it was almost 800,000. In 1964, one out of seven students in public higher education in the South was in a community college—in 1974, it was one in four.

The period of massive enrollment increases in colleges and universities, so common in the 1960's, may now be past. We are in a period of levelling off and, for some institutions, there are declines in enrollment. The nation has gone beyond the time when children born in the "baby boom" after World War II have reached college age, and the nation is now feeling the effects of couples limiting the number of children they have.

But a "steady state" enrollment trend may be less the case for community colleges than for other institutions of postsecondary education. For one thing, it is this segment of postsecondary education which has seen the enrollment of "non-traditional" students as one of its primary missions. More specifically, the community college attracts adults who were not able to enter college as they left high school; "cross-trainees" who wish to receive training which will enable them to leave their present jobs to enter others; secondary school students who are not in the upper reaches of their class, academically, and who have not typically gone to college; and groups traditionally under-represented in higher education: women, minorities, elderly people and persons of very limited financial means.

Howard Bowen, Avery professor of economics at the Claremont Graduate School, has recently noted: "If women attended college at the same rate as men, if low income people could attend at the same rate as high income people, if attendance rates were as high throughout the country as they are in leading states, enrollment would probably be increased by at least 6 or 7 million."[1] While projection of future enrollment is a risky business, there are indications that the community college sector will continue to grow and to serve a broad range of persons in the nation and in the SREB region.

Increasing the "Community" Emphasis

In the early days of the two-year college, its main purpose was to offer the first two years of the baccalaureate degree. It was, then, a truncated version of a four-year college and hence the term "junior college." Students entered the junior college and enrolled in university parallel or "transfer" curricula. Now there is an increasingly heavy emphasis on the other components of the college—career programs, continuing education, and community services. Because of this, the institution is becoming more of a "community" college in the true sense of the phrase, rather than merely a "junior" college.

Career programs, which have traditionally suffered from an image of being inferior to the "academic" program, are now enjoying unprecedented popularity. State legislators, trustees, and the public at large are noting the lack of skilled manpower in certain career fields. At the same time there are increasing reports of persons

with bachelor level degrees in traditional disciplines who are having to accept jobs which require less than the four-year degree.

Career programs tie the college more closely to its parent community, for they are established in response to the employment needs of the community. Generally, each community college has a series of advisory committees which include major employers in the area, and these committees advise the college on the training needs of the community. This information is translated into specific training programs, and upon completion of their studies the graduates are able to enter jobs in their local community.

Continuing education/community services components are increasing in importance, too, as vehicles through which the college can serve its community. Colleges find that the most rapidly growing segment of their enrollment is the adult student. The average age of the community college student in Texas, for example, is reported as 27.8 years. With much discussion of our society as a "learning society" in which people are going in and out of school throughout their entire lives, the idea that college is only for the recent high school graduate is becoming a phenomenon of the past.

THE COMMUNITY SERVICE IDEA

But it is through an Office of Community Services that the college can contribute to the community in ways that until now may have only begun to be seen and understood. Ervin L. Harlacher, now chancellor of the Junior College District of Kansas City, Missouri, has been a leading advocate of community services, which he has defined as "educational, cultural, and recreational services which an educational institution may provide for its community in addition to its regularly scheduled day and evening classes."[2]

Edward J. Gleazer, Jr., president of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, speaks of community service being broad-

Figure 1

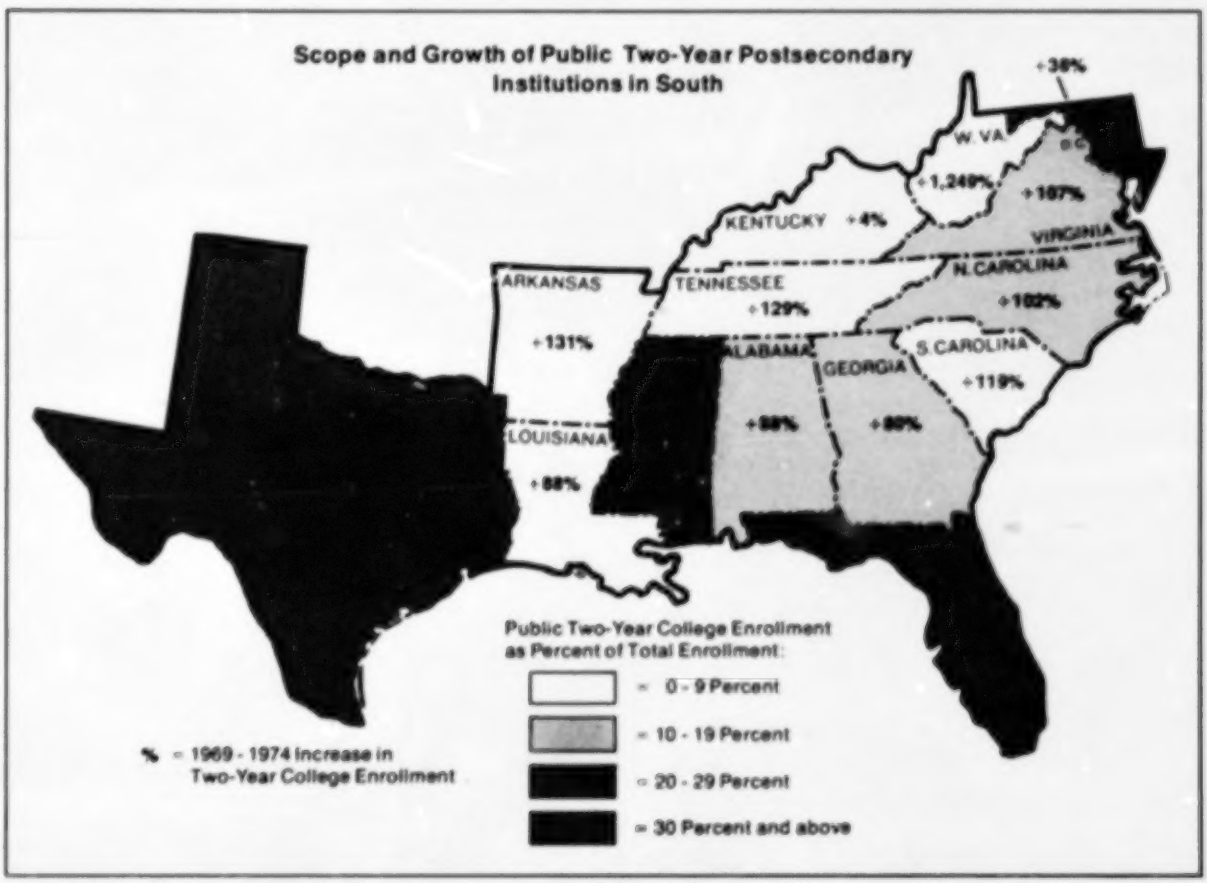


Table 1

Population, Total and Age 65 and Over, Number and Percentage

	Population (000's)	Age 65 and over	Percentage
United States	209,851	21,329	10%
SREB Region	62,021	6,227	10
Alabama	3,539	357	10
Arkansas	2,037	258	13
Florida	7,678	1,190	15
Georgia	4,786	402	8
Kentucky	3,342	355	11
Louisiana	3,764	329	9
Maryland	4,070	326	8
Mississippi	2,281	242	11
North Carolina	5,273	456	9
South Carolina	2,726	212	8
Tennessee	4,126	414	10
Texas	11,794	1,084	9
Virginia	4,811	398	8
West Virginia	1,794	204	11

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1974.

ened from "a department of the college or a sector of college activities to represent the total stance of the college" and the idea of "community use of the college as an educational resource for individual and community development."[3] And Alan Pifer, president of the Carnegie Corporation, suggested recently that community colleges regard themselves less as institutions of higher education and more as a primary agency for community leadership. "They can constantly be devising ways of meeting community needs.... Not least, they can become the hub of a network of institutions and community agencies—the high schools, industry, the church, voluntary agencies, youth groups, even the prison system and the courts—utilizing their educational resources and in turn, becoming a resource for them."[4]

While the idea of the community college being a center for community activities and providing a wide range of services to the community is appealing, there is considerable discussion about just what is the appropriate role of community colleges as a service agency. Dr. George Vaughn, president of Mountain Empire Community College in Virginia, goes directly to the very practical matter of funding. He points out that the problem with expanding the community college role to meet additional community needs is that somehow the bill for such services must be paid. "Today, in most community colleges, the bill is being paid by some formula based upon the number of full-time equivalent students and not on how effectively the college serves as 'the hub of a network of institutions and community agencies.'"[5]

SERVING OLDER PEOPLE: AN ILLUSTRATION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Older age groups are a segment of the population that have not been emphasized by postsecondary institutions in the past. This is changing now, particularly in the two-year colleges, as

more and more programs are being developed to meet the needs of this expanding part of the population (see Table 1 and Figure 2). A better understanding of the increasingly important community service role of community colleges can be gained by looking at some of the programs being carried out for older citizens.

The services offered to older people by some comprehensive community colleges take several forms, including programs to train students to work with older people, volunteer programs for senior citizens, retirement education, cultural enrichment, and instruction provided free or for reduced tuition. More than 100 community colleges and technical institutes in the SREB region have such programs and activities, according to a recent study by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.[6]

Training Programs

In 1972 Dundalk Community College in Dundalk, Maryland, received a grant to operate a pilot program to train paraprofessional counselors in the areas of debt, nutrition, and medicare. After the program was evaluated, the college decided to implement a full curriculum, and Dundalk now offers an associate degree and a certificate in paraprofessional counseling. Most of the graduates will work in agencies which work with the elderly, while others will work in related human service endeavors, such as with handicapped persons.

Tri-County Technical Institute in Pendleton, South Carolina, has been designated by the South Carolina Commission on Aging to train personnel at the two-year degree level for work in the field of aging. Tri-County, which serves an area with over 80,000 persons over age 60, now has the program planned and hopes to implement it in the fall of 1975. The graduates of the program will work in nursing homes, hospitals, and recreation centers. The training will focus on six major concerns of older people: nutrition, shelter, recreation, the sense of belonging, employment, and financial planning.

An interesting characteristic of many programs to train workers for the field of aging is that some of the students are themselves older persons —individuals who wish to re-enter the labor force after a number of years or who are retiring from another career.

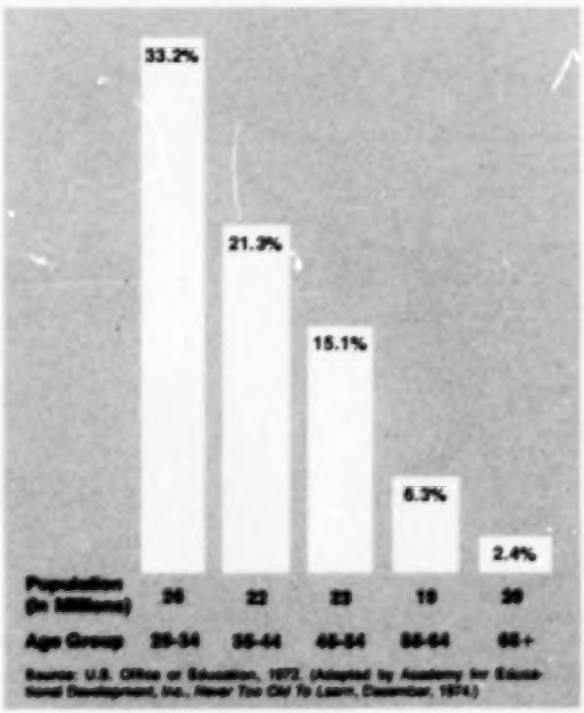
Volunteer Programs

Snead State Junior College in Boaz, Alabama, was probably the first college in the nation to receive a grant from ACTION to provide services by and for older people. The college operates a Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), a federally funded project whose purpose is to involve senior citizens in meaningful volunteer service through local non-profit or public agencies and proprietary nursing homes. The volunteers are active in a wide array of activities in the community: serving meals, "friendly visiting" (e.g., to nursing homes, detention facilities, home visits), teaching crafts to children, including retarded youngsters, sewing quilts, making toys for children, "telephone reassurances," and providing transportation to other older citizens. More than 150 senior volunteers are now active in the project, and in working at 25 community agencies, they contribute almost 2,000 working hours each month.

Snead State President Virgil McCain feels the project for older citizens has many rewards for the college. "It certainly is not in building enrollment, for that is not even a factor here. It is simply a rewarding venture to operate a program that is of obvious benefit to the senior citizens and to the community at large. We feel

Figure 2

A Small Percentage of Older People Are in Adult Education



Source: U.S. Office of Education, 1972. (Adapted by Academy for Educational Development, Inc., Never Too Old To Learn, December, 1974.)

that our service area is a better place for everyone—from pre-schoolers to nursing home patients—since RSVP has been here."

Continuing Education

Probably the greatest degree of activity for older persons is in continuing education. Dozens of community colleges in the South provide credit and avocational courses, seminars, field trips and other programs. Thirty-eight community colleges in the region have reduced or no tuition for older persons. In Virginia the state legislature passed a law in 1974 which provides that older persons who are at a certain income level can take courses at no charge in any public postsecondary institution on a space available basis. Several other SREB states are making similar provisions.

Because it is inconvenient for many persons to come to the campus for classes, many colleges either provide transportation to the campus for classes or take the classes to where the people are ("portable education," it has been called). Florida Junior College at Jacksonville has a program called OPUS (Older People Using Skills) in which classes for older people are conducted at locations throughout the service area. The classes meet in churches, nursing homes, and space provided by local businesses. The courses cover topics of importance to older citizens, such as family finance, personal health, and leisure activities.

A particularly important kind of continuing education is "pre-retirement education." Daytona Beach Community College has conducted a number of pre-retirement courses for older citizens. Plans have been set for a course to be offered soon which is called "Everyday Living in Retirement," which will include consumer protection, health maintenance, housing for retired people, nutrition, legal affairs, and community services for older people.

One of the problems with pre-retirement education programs, according to Edna Smiley, the College's Continuing Education director, is that people tend not to enroll in such classes until they have already retired. "People actually need such courses *before* they retire—people in their early 50's, for example," Smiley states. "Many people do not fully realize the wrenching changes which come about in their lives when they retire, and they simply are not prepared to make the necessary adjustments. One of the most important objectives of our program is to provide educational services to people before they retire so they can meet the changes more easily."

Nutrition Programs

Another serious problem among elderly persons is the tendency to maintain an inadequate diet. Many older persons have limited and fixed incomes and the increasingly high costs of food in recent years have cut substantially into their incomes. Also, there is a tendency, particularly among those persons living alone, not to prepare full well-balanced meals, and the resulting debilitation is quite severe.

In response to the problem, a number of community colleges have set up nutrition programs for older citizens in their service areas. Catonsville Community College in Catonsville, Maryland, sponsors a program called "Lunch Plus," a nutrition program which provides hot noon meals five days a week to about 200 persons. The college has also built into the program a full range of services, including recreation, counseling services, education, and transportation.

Community Leadership

As part of their community service role, colleges often establish working relationships with other agencies and groups to attack problems which older people have. Copiah-Lincoln Junior College in Wesson, Mississippi, has sub-contracted with the National Council of Senior Citizens to operate a Senior Aides program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Applicants are screened by the Mississippi State Employment Service. To be eligible a person must be over age 55 and be below a certain income level. The college is allotted 40 job positions whereby participants can be placed in non-profit oranizations, preferably where they will work with the elderly.

The Senior Aides work in public service jobs, such as in hospitals, nursing homes, and schools, and earn a modest salary. Many of the tasks the Aides perform may seem small, but the work they do can be of immense importance to the persons for whom they are done, according to Edgar Martin, director of Copiah-Lincoln's Aides program. For example, an Aide may provide transportation for an elderly person to see his or her doctor or telephone a person who is confined to his home or to take a stroll with a patient. Martin notes, "In performing these services for someone who needs them, the Aide has at the same time gained a sense of accomplishment for himself."

THE QUESTION OF MISSION

Having looked at the wide range of services being provided to older people in the community, we return to the question, raised earlier, as to

just what is the appropriate role of the community college in serving its parent community. First of all, few will question the worth of programs such as those for the elderly described above. Older citizens in the society have many needs that are not being adequately met, and colleges such as Snead State, Catonsville, and others have obviously identified some of these unmet needs and have taken steps to meet them. But at what point does an institution's desire to serve the community take the college beyond its proper and legitimate purview?

Martha Turnage, dean of community development at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Richmond, Virginia, suggests that to answer this question, one must first consider the institution as a whole. She feels that the entire institution is involved in community service, or as she prefers to call it, "community development." Under this concept, each professional staff member carries out purposeful interaction with the leaders of the various groups in the community, and together they identify the needs of the community. If the need identified is essentially educational, then the college responds by initiating a program to fill the need. If the need is not educational in nature, then it is referred to the appropriate agency which meets the need.

Finally, if a non-educational need is identified and no agency exists to meet the need, the community college plays what Turnage terms a "catalytic role." The institution tries to stimulate the development of a mechanism to meet the need. This might take the form of calling together various persons or agencies who have some concern about the problem and, through discussion and study, can come up with a way to meet the need.

If the community service role is to become a more central part of the mission of the community college, there needs to be consensus and understanding of the college's community service role—what it is and what it is not—first by those in the field and then by the legislatures, the boards of control, and the public at large. Adequate funding can be provided only if the leadership and staff in the colleges themselves are clear as to what they should be doing in community service. Finally, the community college must devise clear and understandable ways to account for the resources expended and to show the results of its community services involvement.

Footnotes

[1]Howard R. Bowen, "Higher Education: A Growth Industry?" *Educational Record*, 55 (Summer, 1974), 150.

[2]Edwin L. Harlacher, *The Community Dimension of the Community College* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 12.

[3]Edward L. Gleazer, Jr., "Beyond the Open Door: The Open College," *Community and Junior College Journal*, 45 (August-September, 1974), 6.

[4]Alan Pifer, "Community College and Community Leadership" *Community and Junior College Journal*, 44 (May, 1974), 23.

[5]George B. Vaughn, "Involving the Entire Faculty in Community Service," *Community College Review*, 2 (March, 1975), 49.

[6]Andrew S. Korim, *Older Americans and Community Colleges: A Guide for Program Implementation* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1974).

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